

THE SUDAN - ASPECTS OF THE SOUTH
GOVERNMENT AMONG SOME OF THE NILOTIC PEOPLES,
1947-52¹

Historians writing about Africa were at one time criticized for interesting themselves in little but the history of colonial rule. Social anthropologists on the other hand have been held to interest themselves too little in colonialism, and too much in out-moded habits of thought, antique customs or mere formal constructs. Anthropologists of the Southern Sudan have not, it is true, prefaced their writings with accounts of the super-structure of the Sudan Government, and this short paper is intended to suggest why this was so.

'Colonialism' varied, of course, in its character, pervasiveness and intensity from place to place and time to time. My direct experience in the Sudan was of the years 1947-52, the period of post-war re-evaluations everywhere, and these observations are thus partial and limited. The Sudan Government was then adapting to rapid political developments both within the Sudan and in international relations. Decolonization was the general policy of the British Government at home, if at the urgent demand of national political leaders abroad; the independence of the (Anglo-Egyptian) Sudan was clearly on the way - but when? In 1948 for example, in a good-humoured conversation between a senior northern Sudanese doctor and a British District Commissioner, the doctor was offering the British perhaps ten years more in the Sudan, against the District Commissioner's bid for at least twenty, more probably forty.

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Sudan Independence Day came eight years later in 1956, and some critics, both British and Sudanese (and Southern Sudanese particularly, who were left with less experience of political bureaucracy than their northern countrymen) have thought that those in power had taken the *status quo ante* for granted for too long, world war or no world war.

Government officers were all candid and hospitable and I was probably thought at first by many people to be a sort of (perhaps eccentric) government officer myself. But among the Dinka, to have no kin is to be a miserable creature indeed, and since I was neither a Dinka nor an Arab, nor a missionary nor a merchant, nor a teacher, nor a technical officer, what other family and category could I belong to but that of British political officers? But I did not concern myself with any overall or official view of the Sudan or of the south. Even now I find it difficult to keep its complex history in mind even in its more general outlines. With two years to learn something about up to a million people as it was supposed, dispersed over perhaps 200,000 square miles, it was enough to try to understand what was constantly and locally before my eyes, the affairs of ordinary daily life. I think it slowly became apparent that I could see and be told whatever people wished without having to take an official line, as government officers eventually must, whatever their private sympathies. At that time many of the senior Dinka who were most often in contact with foreigners were also those most learned in their own traditions, working for and with their own people, over whose freedom of expression they had never had control, and it would not have occurred to them to monitor my enquiries.

The Sudan Government's attitude was clear - administrators were one thing, anthropologists quite another. The Government had sponsored the work of Professor and Mrs. Seligman as early as 1909, and it has been favourably disposed to social anthropology ever since. Many Sudanese nationals are social anthropologists, and still among states in Africa, the Sudan is sympathetic towards foreign scholars. The Sudan Government at that time did not expect anthropological study to be an instrument of government, though it might of course be said in a commonplace way that knowledge is power. I was never asked for any 'operational' report. Some officials, like some anthropologists, may have expected anthropology to be more practically useful than others, but in 1947 anthropology was not thought to be an applied science which could be directed to social engineering. The many ethnographic and historical articles by government officers in the long-lived 'Sudan Notes and Records' show that because of, and beyond, their official duties, many of them were simply and personally interested in Sudanese peoples for their own cultures and qualities; and they talked about them much more than about affairs in the home country, from which indeed they were often delighted to return to the Sudan.

The spirit in which knowledge about the Sudan was gathered is represented in *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan from Within*, a volume of essays written 'for the benefit of serving officers' but 'without

official imprimatur' by public servants with experience of various departments of the Sudan Government and published in 1935. There Evans-Pritchard contributes an ethnological survey of the Sudan, conventional for the time (though his statement that 'during the present administration Arabic culture has spread slowly, but surely, [in the South] through the medium of political officers and traders' was less conventional); and a senior administrator, L.F. Nalder, has an essay entitled 'The Two Sudans: Some Aspects of the South'.

For a book with its title, by the standards of today the absence of direct citations from Sudanese themselves is noticeable; and the prefatory quotation from Keats to the first, historical part of the book - 'From chaos and primaeval darkness came Light' - may appear to deny Sudanese any form of pre-colonial illumination; but rather, I think, it reflects a sense of mission, encouraged in serving officers, and their knowledge and love of literature, in English and for many in the classical languages and Arabic. The second part of the book, with Evans-Pritchard's and Nalder's articles and an essay on 'Devolutionary Principles in Native Administration' by J.A. de C. Hamilton among others, is prefaced by a quotation illustrating more prosaically the political theory of many members of the Sudan Political Service: 'Government in the East is less a matter of the making of constitutions than the establishment of personal relationships'. Give or take the question 'between whom?' and the idea corresponded to those of many Sudanese themselves. The years 1947-52, anticipating and following the Marshall Report (1949) on the promotion of local constitutional government in the Sudan (and commissioned by the Sudan Government), were unusual, since in that short time a transition from personal to constitutional principles of government was being negotiated.

In discussing government among the Southern Sudanese Nilotes it is not possible to leave aside the relations between the predominantly Arab North, the black South, and the British. I do not wish to add to the historical, political and sometimes polemical literature about this complex relationship, but the personal nature of British administration in the south has something to do with it. In southern memory, the British were not associated with the miseries caused by earlier exploitation of the south by governments or adventurers coming from the north (though by no means all northern Sudanese), and by this time they had a kind of familiarity with southern Sudanese, and sympathy for their customs and aspirations, from which some northern Sudanese felt they had been excluded by British policy. Here both Nalder's and Hamilton's essays, written before the recriminations of more recent years concerning those relationships, seem to me to shed a different light. The southern Sudan has now been so much in the public eye, and southern Sudanese so well-known abroad, that it is difficult for us to place ourselves in the situation of those administrators for whom Nalder wrote his essay who were assumed to feel that the peoples of the northern Sudan belonged historically and culturally to their own world, but that the peoples of the south were mysterious and alien.

Nalder's way of expressing this is the more interesting in that since his time the tendency has been to blame the British for long neglecting the south, and then at the last moment identifying themselves with its interests, as though their affinities were rather with the southern peoples than with the northern Arabs. Nalder writes:

A common basis of Arabic race and language, and Islam, with their resulting unity of social and political ideas have fused the northern Sudan into a single whole...the culture of the north is one which is easily comprehensible to ourselves. Islam can claim in some measure to be a development of Christianity and the Koran has borrowed largely from the Old Testament and the New...The broad divisions of Sunni and Shia have their analogy in the two great divisions of Christendom....The political organization of the tribe and its sections under the Nazir and his subordinate sheikhs is to us a normal and logical one, similar to that under which our ancestors may well have lived. Moreover the Arab mentality is not far removed from our own; we continually find things which surprise us, but seldom things which shock us. His general ideas of right and wrong are broadly similar to our own.

In the south, says Nalder, the British official will no longer find himself in this familiar world:

...there is the difference of religious and mental make-up, of attitude to existence, so great that contact becomes difficult...it may not be necessary to postulate for the negro a different type of mentality... but for him our laws of cause and effect have little existence or meaning. He lives...in a tiny portion of a dimly realized earth capriciously interfered with by a spirit world that can be partially controlled by magic. In anything abnormal, anything strange, he realises the workings of that world....Equally difficult of comprehension are his social and political ideas.... It is extraordinarily baffling to us....The African seems to have little political loyalty to anything.

But Nalder also recognized that there was much in the British way of life and rule which the southern Sudanese found equally strange and meaningless, and recommended anthropological studies to officials in the south to help them bridge their differences:

The more [the official] knows about them the better he will get on with them, and the less likely he will be to give orders which appear unjust and oppressive.

Though the sense of mission of members of the Sudan services is very evident in the book, by 1935 the spirit in which it was to be fulfilled was no longer that of the old imperialism. Hamilton wrote:

When native races were first administered by the white the latter had no doubt in their own minds as to the justice of their rule and the right by which they governed. Further they held that their own civilization was so immeasurably superior to that of their subjects that they had no scruples about imposing by force if necessary their own customs and creeds....

The price paid for that secure sense of racial and religious superiority was sporadic rebellion and military confrontation with the subject peoples, not only in the Sudan, and there not only between British and Sudanese. Some officials were killed by the Nilotes. Now a more understanding approach was being adopted. Hamilton continues:

Moreover it had been apparent for some years to many sympathetic administrators, that there was much in native custom and mode of life which was worth supporting and that only by allowing a large measure of freeplay to these could the peoples' natural zest for life be maintained. This new line of thought was greatly fortified by the anthropologists.

But he had no illusions (nor, despite what is sometimes asserted, do most anthropologists) that the cultures of the Sudan should be or could be preserved intact:

A realization of the interdependence of the modern world, the growth of communications and annihilation of distance, render impracticable any idea of leaving the "native" races [Hamilton's inverted commas there are a sign of the times] to work out their own salvation, uncontaminated by contact with whites.

So it was, I suggest, that the understanding of the Arab peoples of the north, which according to Nalder the British had received from their history and upbringing, was supplied for them, in the south, by anthropological knowledge or by an anthropological approach, starting even in the 1920s. Many Sudan administrators had a good knowledge of the customs and the languages of those in their charge, and their administration became the more peaceful for that. It is almost ironical that shortly before Evans-Pritchard first went to study the Nuer in 1930, the Government had found them so intractable as to send troops to subdue them and punish their lawlessness, while it was a District Commissioner himself trained as a social anthropologist who published in 1954 a monograph entitled *Nuer Law*.

Yet even with some knowledge and goodwill, it was difficult

to see how traditional Nilotic political institutions could be reconciled with minimally effective constitutional local government without the presence of an executive officer who could compel the people to implement the local councils' decisions; but this, as Nalder says, would violate the very principles upon which 'Native Authorities' were founded. The major difficulties were the traditional division of political influence among numerous local leaders, the hostility with which many of the southern peoples regarded any encroachment on their personal freedom of action and recourse to 'self-help', their opposition therefore to the appearance of domination, and the traditional limitations of any chief's judicial powers. Among the Nilotes it was not as though an indigenous autocratic form of government were being replaced by something more representative of the common people. Everyone thought himself his own master. Even a representative local government, if given real executive powers, would seem to deprive the Dinka and others of rights which to their minds had always been unquestionably theirs. As Dr. Deng says more bluntly: 'Until recently a policeman sent to seize a man's cow was likely to get hit on the head with a club'.

So the root of the problem of introducing modern democratic government into the south was to make it appear to be government of the people by the people and for the people when they had always thought they had it. Earlier experiences of foreign would-be overlords had been intolerable, and the Dinka were quick to resent any sign of coercion by their own countrymen also. Thus while enlightened British officials saw their task as gradually nurturing a humane, democratic, constitutional form of local government among them (Dr. A.H. Marshall who wrote the Marshall Report on local government was not 'an old Africa hand' but the city treasurer of Coventry), most southerners who had not received a European-style education, and many who had, retained the image of 'the Government' as a foreign, oppressive organization imposed upon them by force.

The Dinka for example recognize several different kinds of foreigners, *jur*. The most acceptable are their very distant kinsmen the Luo or 'black foreigners', *jur col*; Arab types of people are 'dark brown foreigners', *jur matthiang*, which also means 'foreigners with horses', while European types are 'bright red foreigners', *jur thith*, cf. 'rednecks', perhaps. But the commonest word for Europeans and their government was *turek*, 'Turk', harking back to the detested Turco-Egyptian regime of up to a hundred years earlier. And whereas on the principles of indirect rule the British wished to administer as far as possible through traditionally established chiefs according to local custom, the Dinka commonly spoke of those very chiefs as foreigners, *jur*, or as 'black Turks', *turing col* when they tried to assign tasks which were resented, such as laborious unpaid work to keep the roads open.

Government itself then, (*Hakuma*, from the Arabic) for these Nilotes, was some sort of mainly incomprehensible abstract entity really located in some distant place (where were Khartoum or

London?) which occasionally interfered in their lives with instructions brought in the person of some foreign official with a few servants and policemen. Yet District Commissioners and other officials in Dinkaland, if they stayed long enough, were given individual praise-names like those of the Dinka themselves, in imagery derived from the colours of oxen, and I am sure that District Commissioners known familiarly as 'Great Black Ant', or 'Black Eyes', or 'Shade of the Tree' and so on did not incur the opprobrium attached to 'the Government' as an abstract force.

Nevertheless there is a marked difference between the associations of the Dinka words for their traditional form of political order, and those used for the order imposed by the Sudan Government, even though in many cases the same chiefs represented both. The traditional form of government - if one can so call the kind of political influence exercised by chiefs - was described in terms associated with maintaining and supporting correct behaviour (*cieng baai*) and looking after and bringing up and helping, as with children in a family (*koc muk*); or, since the traditional chiefs were also priests, carrying or upholding people's very lives. The associations of the word used for governing in the modern sense, on the other hand, were those of tethering or constraining in some way, *mac baai*. The word *mac* means to tether or restrain and reserve a beast for some purpose, as when an ox is promised to a particular divinity, and taken out of the usual circulation in marriage payments, or when cattle are handed over to secure a girl in marriage and, to translate literally, 'tied on the girl's back'. When used in relation to what modern government does, *mac* again has this sense of restraining, and is the word used for imprisoning - though local gaols were mostly very open prisons - those whom the Government has 'seized' or 'captured'. And a major complaint about the speed with which independence came in the south was that there had not been time to reconcile these two different sets of political ideas, which could only be done by talking through with influential local people the kinds of political developments which were inevitable if the Dinka and others were to be able to hold their own in the modern world. At the time of which I am writing, the District Commissioners' anthropological knowledge of the people for whom they were responsible was enough to permit discussion of Dinka affairs in their own terms; and the Dinka are very outspoken. There had indeed been mistakes made through placing too much reliance on anthropological categories, most particularly in assuming that there were ('good') priests and ('bad') magicians, and labelling as magician some great men who were accepted as spokesmen of God. Hence even prophets had been gravely misunderstood with serious consequences. But as the Southern chiefs started to talk things through with the District Commissioners, each side began to understand where their real differences and difficulties lay. I give an example from a meeting between District Commissioners and Dinka chiefs in 1939. I have to preface it by saying that it was well known that among many tribal peoples (and some District Commissioners were

Scottish) common descent as members of clans and lineages binds individuals together by a sense of collective responsibility, and in some situations results in their being regarded as equivalent to each other. Thus, members of the man's descent group quite outside the immediate family, had to contribute cattle to be given to the girl's 'clan' when she became a wife of their clansman. Similarly, the murder of any member of one descent group by a member of another was required to be avenged by any male member of the one by killing any male member of the other unless compensation in cattle had been accepted. On one occasion two young Dinka men met each other on a journey and were walking together in a friendly way when they found in conversation that they belonged to clans at feud with each other. One killed the other.

But the total identification of the individual with the group among 'primitive' or 'tribal' peoples was often crudely overstated in anthropological writings, and at the District Commissioners' meeting mentioned, this sort of matter was discussed between the District Commissioners and the Dinka chiefs. Their answer is reported in a Government file as follows:

The suggestion that Government tax should be communal and not individual seemed to them ridiculous. When asked why, if the clan was willing to protect a cattleless member who had killed another by payment of blood cattle, should not the rich assist the poor in the matter of taxation, the unanimous reply was that such assistance was only given for the good of the clan. If a wife was not found for a healthy but cattleless man, he could not breed children who would in time be an assistance to the clan, or if a killing was not settled in blood cattle, by their laws any member of the clan was liable to be killed in vendetta. The payment of Government taxes however benefited nobody but the government and was therefore a matter between the Government and the individual. They argued that the communal payment of cattle was an indigenous system of insurance evolved by their forefathers. The system could not be extended to meet modern needs such as taxes because they were always a debit on the clan's wealth, and never an asset as in interclan payments.

Upon such small moves towards mutual understanding did the acceptability of a whole fiscal system depend. There is no doubt in my mind that the personal discussions between the relatively few British officials and local leaders in which they gained more understanding of each other's assumptions and prejudices were a most important foundation for any form of modern 'Western type' government among the Dinka and other southerners. They were very different in spirit from the usual form of 'consultation' in colonies where foreign rule was heavier-handed and more conspicuous, with individual members of the subject communities trying

to explain their views in unfamiliar surroundings to impersonal bureaucrats.

In 1947 in the Southern Sudan, there were only forty-two Sudan political officers representing 'the Government' in perhaps 250,000 square miles of territory, so it is not surprising that their government was on the whole very personal, and that official policy was to exercise it as lightly and inconspicuously as was consonant with keeping some sort of peace. As early as 1937, the then Governor-General Sir John Maffey ended a note on an official Government Memorandum of 1922 (which followed the Milner report on native policy of 1921) with the maxim:

Experiment boldly with schemes of transferred administrative control, making no fetish of efficiency, remembering that in the long run the temper of his own people will do more to keep a native ruler straight than alien interference, and not forgetting that our efficiency is often more apparent than real and lacks those picturesque and 'amour propre' qualities of native rule which compensate for its apparent crudities.

District Commissioners in fact had primarily the task of intervening to prevent or put a stop to tribal fights and cattle-raiding, to enforce where necessary the decisions of the chiefs' courts (by this time the Dinka were becoming accustomed if not reconciled to the notion that judgments given there could be put into effect) and keeping open communications.

Yet of course this very personal form of government, and the number and variety of tasks which District Commissioners were required to perform or supervise, did exclude from the process of government very many of the governed, increasing numbers of them educated and accustomed to 'western' ideas. (It is said that during a strike at Rumbek secondary school over the quality of the food, the pupils were heard saying 'to the tumbrils with him' outside the headmaster's office). This situation was to be remedied by the Marshall Report of 1949, to which I now turn.

Though I am not sure that District Commissioners would all agree with Dr. Marshall that they were '...a bewildered race unable to carry out all their work, and uncertain what to leave undone', the list of their functions which he drew up in consultation with them seems to make them each into a whole local government in himself. There are some thirty of these main functions, varying from settling major tribal disagreements and directing the police service, to town planning and looking after local dairies and gardens. All these were to be transferred, some to specialized officers of the central government, some to certain *ad hoc* authorities, some to Province Headquarters and some to local authorities in themselves. The District Commissioners were to bring about this transfer as they phased themselves out. The recommendations of the Report were on the whole approved and welcomed by the Sudan Government. The then Civil Secretary, Sir James Robertson, gave an address to Council

in presenting it, at the end of which he made some comments on the role of the District Commissioner summing up how they themselves saw their work, though most would not have said it of themselves. 'The District Officer as such will presumably ultimately disappear', said Sir James, but:

The difficulty is going to be in carrying out the District Officer's work without incurring considerable increase in expenditure. "The Jack of all Trades" may have been an amateur as Dr. Marshall says, but he was enthusiastic, capable, and could get work done cheaply without much assistance....As head of the political service and an ex-district and provincial official, it may be thought hardly my place to say a word here about the work which District Commissioners have done in the past. But it is very largely due to them, their devotion to duty, courage in loneliness and illness, sense of justice and fair play, that the Sudan is so well-administered today.

I had left Dinkaland before much could be observed of the change in government among the Dinka which the Marshall Report was intended to guide them towards, though Gogrial where I started work had already advanced further in that direction than many other parts of the Southern Sudan. Among the Anuak, to whom I had then gone, isolated from any government centre as they were for much of the year, the dynastic and inter-village rivalries continued as usual. The change from British to Sudanese government in Khartoum was seen as just a remote version of their own village 'revolutions' (*agem*), in which a headman who has ceased to satisfy the majority of his people is challenged by his opponents and often forcibly expelled in favour of another member of his family. Many years before - and this is an indication of a difficulty felt more widely in one form or another in producing any real electoral system there - the District Commissioner had tried to introduce a reform in the manner in which the ancient beads which conferred nobility on members of the noble house of the Anuak were circulated. These valuable and unique necklaces had traditionally remained in the possession of any one of several powerful nobles, each reigning independently in his own village until they were freely handed over to a chosen successor or, as became more usual, wrested from him by force by a dynastic rival and his followers. This often caused bloodshed, and the District Commissioner tried to persuade the more important of the nobles to have a periodic election of one of their number to hold the necklaces for a limited period and then peaceably pass this on to an elected successor. In fact each noble voted for himself as candidate, and the District Commissioner, with a threat of force, appointed whom he thought fit to be the recipient, some say, by tossing a coin.

Though not of this kind or intensity, the histories of rivalries and conflict between different local leaders among both

the Dinka and Nuer made it difficult initially for them to co-operate and accept collective responsibility. Each, as in the traditional system, would tend to put the interests of his own section first, and if he did not do so would be likely to lose the local support which had placed him in his official position in the first place. I have little direct information about this matter for the Dinka, and since probably their kind of chieftainship was more influential than chieftainship among the Nuer, some of the problems arising among them may have been different from those which arose among the Nuer. But given the basic similarities of their interests, political organization and geographical distribution, I think much that is said of the beginnings of local government among the Nuer, and which has been described in a paper by Mr. P.L. Roussel who as a District Commissioner was involved in bringing it into being, must have applied to the Dinka also.

Like the Dinka, the Nuer are widely dispersed and constantly moving over long distances pasturing their herds. Nomadism in itself has always been difficult to reconcile with central control, as the one-time obsession of many Middle Eastern countries with policies of settlement, 'sedentization', bears witness. But in addition to this, and congruent with it, the political structure of this people was maintained by what Evans-Pritchard called 'fission and fusion' - that is, the tribes were held together by the way in which political segments which were opposed to each other at lower levels of political activity, united with each other when any one of them came into conflict with more distant, similarly composed, groups. There was no tradition of chiefly rule, but from time to time and place to place men of remarkable personality and speaking in the name of God - prophets as Evans-Pritchard called them - gained wide political influence. Since the memory of the greatest of these is still held in reverence, Roussel's comments on their position vis-à-vis 'government' are interesting:

The only effective Nuer leaders were their prophets, especially in times of stress. These, however, sprang up erratically here and there...it was unreliable and spasmodic and formed no basis for a governing class. ...However they are always a very present source of influence, and any relaxing of government vigilance, or the appearance of an outside threat to the Nuer tribes, might well be the signal for their reappearance with an influence far beyond that of any Government official who might be in charge of that area. Indeed, a successful prophet may well have adherence from beyond his own tribal boundaries within Nuerland, while a well-known Dinka prophet will attract Nuer and vice-versa.

This situation, political because religious, might well affect therefore the stability of any local secular government,

but it could scarcely be allowed for in Dr. Marshall's report. The people of Coventry could scarcely abandon the city council to follow a religious revivalist.

The difficulties which faced the Zeraf Island Rural District Council - the first experiment in local government among the Nuer following the publication of the Marshall Report in 1949 - started with deciding where it should be centred. If in Britain at the present time the redrawing of local authority boundaries has created quite deep feelings of resentment, it can be imagined that the creation of an entirely new authority intended democratically to administer a highly mobile population consisting of communities historically often in conflict raised many strong objections. Consequently not only had geographical location to be taken into account, including the vast climatic and ecological differences between different seasons of the year in that part of the world, but also tribal affiliations. For example, plans for a second council were shelved not only on grounds of communications but because of

...objections on purely tribal grounds, for although the Ghol and Nyarreweng Dinka might settle down with the Baar Gaweir (Nuer) in a common council, it was expecting rather much that the Radh Gaweir would settle down with the Baar (Nuer) as their relations had always been at the best in the nature of veiled hostility. Again, the Dinka to the North of central Nuer District had little affinity with any of the other tribal sections involved and were in any case a very scattered community who would have fitted in much better with the Ngok Dinka of Malakal District with whom they had much closer connections in every way.

But once a council was established, its difficulties were in fact those of implementing orders, the difficulties indeed of a District Commissioner's in the past, but without his indifference to unpopularity if force had eventually to be used. Members of the council discussed the plans and practice of government intelligently and with detailed local knowledge, but it was found difficult to execute their decisions. I take as an example what was always a source of anger and opposition to the Government - forced or very cheap labour on the roads. Among the Dinka in fact some people by 1950 were beginning to value communications for some of the benefits they promised to bring - certain trade goods, some educational and medical services, and even the possibility of intervention to prevent tribal fighting from going too far, for to have to make peace by *force majeure* did at least produce without loss of face some peace, which the more statesmanlike Dinka leaders often inwardly wanted to have imposed on their hot-headed young warriors. Unfortunately the main period for repairing the roads was after the rains, when the harvest was in, and traditionally a time for relaxation, dancing and feasting. According to the minutes of the Zeraf Island District

Council, the reallocation of roadwork was discussed at its meeting in 1951, and was - in the District Commissioner's words - 'one up to the council'. I shall quote part of the minute, because it gives an impression of the grass-roots problems, so to call them, of maintaining modern government services among people who may want them but do not wish, unpaid, to undertake them themselves. (And here one must ask how many of us would in normal circumstances acquiesce in working on these terms to keep the roads in repair?)

Bwom Wur, Executive Chief of the Fagwir Court area, said that in the past anyone who lived east of the Zeraf had done work east of it, and anyone who lived west of it had done work west of it.

There was a *gatwot* (clan head) called Bangoat, he and his stretch of roadwork were in the west of the Zeraf, but some of his men lived on the east of it and worked with a *gatwot* not their own. Similarly there was a *gatwot* called Lam Cine, he and his stretch of roadwork were on the east of the Zeraf, but some of them lived on the west of it, and worked with a *gatwot* not their own....

And so forth until a reasonable decision was reached, and, as appears, successfully implemented for a year under the chairmanship of a Nuer of very strong personality with political experience of central government affairs. But at the end of 1952 he

...left to take up politics again, and the council immediately relapsed. Their roadwork, so well started, was in danger of being ruined and was only saved by the intervention of the District Commissioner, while council buildings were so neglected that they finally had to be repaired by prison labour.

It is because so much of the government's place in the lives of the Dinka and others went no deeper than this, because traditional forms of political control were so strong just beneath the surface of modern government and so ready to reassert themselves, that social anthropologists have been able to write a great deal about these peoples without dwelling at length on their colonial rulers. I can imagine that now, if money for development is made available to pay people for performing unpleasant tasks, and some local executive can back up effectively the local elected authorities, the situation may have changed considerably. But between 1947 and 1952, and presumably until the British left at least, the only way to real change was by maintaining a constant dialogue between the people and the administration, talking things through for as long as necessary in open forum, and allowing for the exercise of the rhetorical skills, the sharpness in debate, the humour and satire, with which these peoples are remarkably well-endowed. For post-independence (for the most

part Arab) administrators, new to the kind of history and dialogue I have sketchily described, to try to take over in the middle of it was bound to place them in very great difficulties, eventually made insoluble for years of war by the use of military force, which the British had learnt more and more to hold in reserve.

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